Talk of the Town by ballroompink

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Summary:

Nosy busybodies of Hawkins.

1. Chapter 1

February 6, 1985

It's a brisk February day and Chief Jim Hopper is walking around downtown Hawkins, patrolling the streets because it is his job, and it does take him by Melvald's General Store and Joyce Byers and he can't complain about that. The almost daily constitutional along with giving up donuts and booze hasn't hurt his waistline.

He's making his way past the Radio Shack, which didn't shutter when Bob Newby died three months prior as Will's friends expected. It went right on selling its wares short one very skilled man. One very brave man. Sad but expected.

As he nears Melvald's, he passes Esther Ford and Vera Lenker, known busybodies, in the middle of a conversation.

"She is pixelated."

"Pixelated?"

"She's always been pixelated and it's only gotten worse over the years."

"The past few years have been most unkind to her. … Well, hello Chief." Mrs. Lenker the one with less sour face says to him startled to be caught gossiping about the police chief's friend.

Hopper tips his hat to the so-called ladies and they walk away shamefaced. He takes a deep breath and wills himself from wishing they would turn the corner and slip on a patch of ice.

Screw it.

He mutters quietly to himself, "Break a hip, you old biddies."
He rubs his beard and arranges his face into a more pleasant expression so he won't alarm his friend.

The bell rings and his actions are for naught when he sees Joyce take no notice of him. She's sitting behind the counter staring off into

space.

He notices Bonnie Schmidt and Doreen Yates milling about and giving Joyce judgmental looks.

Was there a group trip to Melvald's after pinochle or something?

The voice of Reba McEntire fills the general store.

If I sink any lower I'll go under
If I cry anymore I'll go blind
Oh there ain't no relief for this missing you grief
How long can you torture my mind
How blue can you make me
How long till I heal
How can I go on loving you when you're gone
How blue can I feel

Well, no wonder. That damn song. He can plainly see she's triggered.

Hop leans back against the counter and gives a stern look to the few customers, one usually saved for punks such as the Zimmerman brothers, and softly alerts Joyce to his presence.

"How ya doing, Joyce?"

More than a little startled, Joyce smiles up at him with a dewy look.

"Hi Hopper," his old friend says to him not bothering to cover the sadness in her voice. "Fine. Just fine."

"Sure. … Sure. Customers giving you any complaints today?"

"Nope. Haven't noticed anything out of the ordinary."

That was one good thing with Joyce's blanking out with grief. She hadn't noticed those old crones judging her.

"What? Why? Have you been tracking some deviant element in our quiet town?" She dramatically whispers with a sly grin. The switch from sad to sassy is tangled, but her ability to be both is another thing he admires about his old friend. The same could be said about

him perhaps, but he suspects he just comes off as evasive and smartass.

“No reason.”

She stands up and leans across the counter. “You’d tell me right?”

“Oh, of course. Before Powell, and definitely before Callahan. But after Florence.”

Joyce nods comically at the logic behind that statement.

As Doreen Yates meanders up to the counter with her various sundries, Hopper takes that as his cue that it’s time to continue his patrol.

Hopper gives Joyce’s hand an encouraging squeeze, knocks hesitantly on the counter and then catches Bonnie Schmidt give Doreen a look.

But then he catches another look. A conspiratorial eye roll.

She keeps a guy on his toes. No second-guessing that.

2. Chapter 2

February 19, 1985

As Vera Lenker and Bonnie Schmidt were both widows and Doreen Yates and Esther Ford's husbands were more interested in their golf game or skeet shooting or whatever they did to get out of the house, the post-Valentine's Day pinochle game at Bonnie's house in Loch Nora was focused solely on town gossip.

After dealing cards, Esther brings up various esteemed members of the community.

"Marjorie Lewis has … cancer." Esther whispers the last word.

"Oh, that's terrible. She's always a welcoming face at church. I'll have to check in on her," Vera replies between counting her cards.

"I ran into Linda Harrington at the grocery store over the weekend and she was sporting a pretty nice tennis bracelet. Emeralds. Walter must have really needed to make up for something, I suspect." Bonnie added.

"Isn't their 20th anniversary coming up?"

"The man is a known philander, Vera; my money is on he's guilty of something."

"Probably so."

"What did you set out for lunch, Bonnie?"

"Oh, I stopped at Grady's Deli and picked up some of Edna's seven-layer salad and some finger sandwiches. And I have some decaf in the pot. Oh, and some iced tea is made up in the fridge. Anyone want anything right now?

"No. Not right now."

"Maybe in a bit."

“I’m fine.”

“Guess who Dot Ewell told me picked out some lilies of the valley to send the other day?” Esther asked.

“Is it who I think it is?” Doreen responds.

“Who?” Vera asked, focused more on her hand.

“It was the chief. He was ordering them for that kook.” Esther answered.

“Oh, Joyce Byers!”

“Finally! I was wondering when he was going to get around to it.” Bonine exclaimed.

“Get around to asking her out or crossing her off his list of ladies of Hawkins?” Doreen inquired.

“Good question. That man has gone through every woman in town, practically. Marissa Kerbaugh the librarian, Laura Daley at the radio station, Suzanne Malone the court reporter. I swear, Bonnie, if you had batted your eyes in his direction after Clarence died you could have had your chance with him.” Esther declared.

“Oh, Essie, he and Gary were in Boy Scouts together.” Bonnie chuckled referring to her oldest boy.

The ladies all shared a laugh.

“He also picked up a little bouquet of daisies in a cute bear vase. Dot called it cute, so maybe he’s got younger gal in the wings? … The man is a scoundrel.” Esther shared.

The pinochle group all hummed in agreement.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you can figure out who the daisies are for.

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

February 22, 1985
Second date

February 22, 1985

Joyce and Hopper were on the same wavelength concerning organized religion. Hopper never had much to do with church and when Sara died he cursed any and all higher deities; Joyce thought it was all bullshit because every single church in Hawkins was filled with hypocrites who every other day of the week looked down upon her and her boys.

However, they recently learned they were both fans of the Knights of Columbus' Friday Fish Fry during Lent. Second dates don't get much hotter in Hawkins than eating fried fish served during the holy season. Hopper hadn't gone on a second date with anyone since, well, Diane.

Walking into the hall holding Joyce Byers' hand, they drew a few looks. He spotted a few unfriendly faces – Alderwoman Muriel Malone and her daughter, Suzanne, who he may have fooled around with a few years back; a few of the pinochle club broads; and Eleanor Gillespie.

Joyce motions to Hopper to lean down so she could whisper in his ear, "That bitch from the middle school office is over there."

"Oh yeah, Doris. I spot her. There's Esther Ford and Doreen Yates holding court with their husbands and Doris' husband. He's a chiropractor, right? Alan?"

"Alvin."

Hopper gives her hand a comforting squeeze and replies, "If she starts anything, I'll ticket their car on our way out, OK?"

Joyce flashes one of her rare, but amazing smiles.

After picking up their styrofoam containers and drinks, the couple look around for a spot in the packed hall. Joyce gives Hopper a mischievous look and leads them to table near the old busybodies.

“Joyce, you sure?” He could sense she was steeling herself up, she had that Joyce Byers look that just about did him in.

“Let them talk.” She made stubborn so charming.

The only two seats together were next to each other so sitting side by side, Joyce and Hop cocooned themselves from the rest of the fish fry. They were completely oblivious to the looks they attracted with their animated and warm conversation. The intimacy between them shocked the ladies who were paying attention. The instance when the chief of police wipes his hands and proceeded to brush a strand of hair behind Joyce’s ear led to a look that spoke volumes over their husbands’ conversations concerning the next day’s Indiana-Purdue game.

At some point, the ladies were distracted and Joyce and Hop were able to slip out undetected. However, when the pinochle ladies and their husbands leave the K of C’s they do notice the Chief Hopper and Joyce Byers necking for the world to see in his Chevy Blazer.